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WASHINGTON — Rep. William Lacy Clay, D-Mo., said Monday that he wanted the government to halt immigration raids next year to ensure an accurate count in the 2010 census.

Speaking at a Census Bureau conference being held one year before Census Day 2010, Clay and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke tried to allay fears among Hispanics and Asians in areas where immigrants often mistake census workers for tax collectors or law enforcement officials.

Clay went a step further, urging the partnership groups, ranging from the AFL-CIO and Coca-Cola to the NAACP and Vote Latino, to expose any “sinister tricks” to dissuade immigrants from completing their census forms.

There are nearly 12 million undocumented workers in the United States, many of them clustered in California, New York, Florida and Texas, which stand to either lose House seats or gain fewer seats depending on whether their Hispanic residents are fully counted.

Clay pointed out that immigration officials halted raids during the 2000 census.

“It think it should be repeated to tamp down on any fears the immigrant population might have on certain raids, whether they are here legally or not,” said Clay, who heads the House subcommittee overseeing the census. “They don’t want that hanging over them.”

In 2000, immigration officials informally agreed, at the request of the Census Bureau, to not conduct large-scale immigration raids. The bureau asked the Homeland Security Department two years ago to hold off again in 2010, but was rejected by the administration of President George W. Bush, which said it would continue to enforce federal laws.

At the conference on Monday, according to the Washington Post, Clay said, “We need to know what’s happening in your communities and how we can help you. We will also depend on you to expose any attempts to misinform or deceive the public by those who are attempting to suppress the count.”